MdM Discourse Analysis workshop

Session 2: Working with Interview data

AIMS

The primary purpose of this exercise is to give you some experience in analysing textual material from a discursive perspective Again, the questions provided are intended principally as prompts to get you thinking about the possible analytic claims we can make about the material. Please feel free to note anything else interesting about the material from a discursive perspective.

Second, the session is intended to give you some experience of employing the Foucauldian analytic category 'discourse' and Discursive Psychology. As discussed in the presentation, in this perspective, a discourse is *a coherent system of meanings which constructs objects and contains subjects*. Discourses are also said to reproduce power relations, to be historically located and linked to institutions. Identifying a discourse, as for interpretative repertoires (and other analytic categories), may involve general cultural awareness and/or specialized knowledge, depending on the topic. And, again, free association around particular words, phrases or metaphors is a useful starting point in the analytic process.

However, because this data is transcribed (interview) conversation and the topic of discussion in these interviews is one of controversy, you will also find it useful to draw upon some of the ideas we came across when we looked at Discursive Psychology. In particular, issues of fact construction, rhetoric and stake inoculation may be worth commenting on.

A third aim of the session is for you to consider some the possible ethical and methodological issues that might be involved in research on

particularly sensitive topics. The topic of the interview material presented below, are:

Firstly M.E. (sometimes called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome), is controversial, and therefore discourse analytic claims about participants' arguments might be understood as not external to this controversy.

Secondly: An extract from an Interview between Hala Mahmoud and a male Sudanese refugee in his early 20s living in Cairo on the subject of culture , identity and coping with dislocation and migration.

Exercise 1

ME (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) interview material

The material below comprises edited extracts from interviews carried out (and analysed) by an MSc Health Psychology student. All the interviewees were members of an M.E. support group. The research project was concerned with how the speakers characterized the physical versus the psychological, and how they described their relations with their GPs (doctors). For many M.E. sufferers, the initial response of their doctor was to suggest that their condition was psychological in origin and therefore to recommend psychiatric treatment – either this or to deny that there was a real problem at all. The argument about the status of the illness involves issues of power (the ability of the medical establishment to determine what counts as an illness) and has major consequences for the sufferer (e.g., only with official medical recognition can a sufferer claim sickness benefits).

Note that the material is heavily edited to select the extracts which may be of most interest. Square brackets like so [ ] indicate where material has been edited out (this could be as little as a line or as much as several pages).

Read (and re-read) the material with a view to answering the following questions.

(1) How do the speakers characterize ME? How are claims that it is a physical (physiological, biological, organic etc.) problem, rather than a psychological (psychiatric etc.) one, warranted?

(2) How do the speakers characterize the practice of science? Is science part of the problem or part of the solution? (Show the variety in the characterizations of science and medicine.)

(3) How are the speakers' relations with their doctor (GP) and medics in general characterized? How might such characterizations serve to position the speaker? (Show the variety of characterizations.)

To what extent can the constructions you have identified and analysed above be understood as *discourses*?

Feel free to make notes, circles, underlining etc. on the texts. Use quote numbers for reference.

Two further issues for thought and discussion:

(4) What might be the ethical issues involved in a research project like this? Are there other ways in which constructions of ME might be studied which may be less ethically problematic?

(5) What are some of the methodological issues involved in using interview material for discourse analysis?

INTERVIEW DATA START

Oscar's Interview

Int: Often people develop ideas about the cause of their illness. Did you develop any ideas about the cause?

[]

Oscar1: one of the key problems I seem to have is with the autonomic nervous system which is that the involuntary ones reflexes and responses and stress responses in particular so I kind of had an intolerance and

stresses and things like that um so that's the first thing the predisposition but what triggered it um and what pushed me over the edge I really dont know, there was some emotional stuff going on at high school at that exact same time

[ ]

Oscar2: because my sort of brain patterns were sort of still becoming established because that the age where things are getting set. Because I was having a rough ride at that particular time and it was sustained my physiological responses became set in the wrong way

[ ]

Oscar3: it's possible I suppose that those responses were so strong because I learned the wrong responses at the wrong age it's just impossible to undo it certainly uh you know some of the tests I had done privately are more specialised and you know have shown up the fact that um in terms of my heart rate patterns the um brain and body chemistry, I seem to be kind of stuck in the kind of stress response the two nervous systems coming out of the heart, there's the sympathetic and the parasympathetic I don't know if you know about this stuff, and apparently this guy’s tests were able to show that I'm stuck in a a sympathetic fight or flight thing response at all times which is really kind of wearing me out all the time

Int: How do you view the distinction between the physical and psychological in ME?

[ ]

Oscar4: I don't doubt that the two aren't linked very closely but um my attitude now is that my problems are that my problems are neurological as opposed to psychological. That is to say that there are mechanisms in the brain probably, as it comes down to the brain and the HPA axis hypothalmic-pituitary-adrenal side that's kind of malfunctioning, an element of that may just be psychological, but undoubtedly overwhelmingly, whatever is going wrong of its own accord if you like...

[ ]

Oscar5: I sometimes think there's not a lot of point in the um the campaign groups doing too much work on public attitudes until research has got to the stage where there is a diagnostic test I sometimes think that they should put all of their money into the research. So um yeh just that's why I sometimes think there's little point in trying to counteract prejudice because you're only going to get so far without a scientific basis for it because you just can't argue it

Natalie's Interview

Some of the research on ME has been rather faulty. It's not hard to publicize quite erroneous views in the medical journals but it does take reassurance from the fact that I do think that ultimately the right thing will stand up and if they look at it long enough they will eventually come to the correct conclusion

[ ]

Natalie2: it's interesting from a sort of psychological point of view you can see how much prestige and ego gets into science even though people will loudly maintain that people are detached and how difficult it is for to develop fair assessments of an illness like this... scientifically people aren't taking enough time to understand the realities of the illness before they start devising experiments coming up with conclusions because if they actually spoke to people long enough they would actually understand, but they want to do everything in ten minutes and get their paper out double quick

[ ]

Natalie3: There's a lot of empire-building, I think psychiatrists would like to claim ME is a psychiatric illness because there's funding that goes along with it...

[ ]

Natalie4: The scientific attitude to medicine doesn't help the doctors relate to their patients as people um, and I think this is particularly bad with psychiatrists... Because our experience of our bodies is not scientific and it does mean that the experience of our bodies is emotional, so we

have a lot of problems with psychiatrists who are not hearing what their patients are actually telling them

Stephen’s interview

Int: Were there any experiences or symptoms which first made you think or realise that you had ME?

[ ]

Stephen1: they couldn't find out what was wrong with me, I then went to various other private hospitals I've seen private physicians, I've had brain scans, er, all of which cost me a great deal of money, uh and none of them have come up with any answer as to what is actually wrong with me, I know you've probably got some questions about my own doctor later but even he um I don't think knows what's wrong with me, so you have to start trying to help yourself

[ ]

Stephen2: but I can assure you it exists, there's no way I'm making this up, I don't think anybody who feels the way I do would make this up because it is too serious uh, to be uh a game or a joke because it affects your whole life, I would say it is 90% physically and 10% mental , obviously it affects you greatly mentally if you're sitting there unable to move or struggling to move this is going to affect your, the way you see life

[ ]

Int: How do you see the physical/ psychological distinction in ME?

Stephen3: Of course a lot of doctors believe it's all in your mind I can assure you that's a load of rubbish. Obviously the mind is a very powerful tool. I've laid on that sofa and said to myself I can't get up, you can't physically move you say to yourself you say to yourself you will get up somehow.... the brain is a very powerful instrument , chronic chronic fatigue is however a physical thing, you can debate about what it's caused by, but it's definitely physical, I feel physically weak, I feel physically tired, I feel physically exhausted, these are physical things, just because you can't see them, it's not like a broken bone or broken head or

broken leg, you can't see tiredness, other than the person dragging themselves around, you can't test it cos to test tiredness you need to know what they were like before they became tired and you know to try and judge one against the other, how can you actually test muscles that although they work are tired tiredness is is um a concept and therefore it is is almost unmeasurable,

Int: What would you say to someone who said ME was a psychiatric condition?

Stephen4: Well people have said that, and I know that's what they think, unfortunately anything that can't be found to have a physical basis therefore must be to do with the mind, that's exactly the problem I I come up with because I knew there was something wrong but I didn't know what it is, when you feel so tired and exhausted and weak and ill and nobody knows what it is,it's going to affect your mind, how can it not?

[ ]

Stephen5: It's devastating to feel so ill and yet people are saying to you ur there's nothing wrong with you nothing treatably wrong with you but nothing they can find. There's no test for ME I can't go to the doctor and he'll say look we'll do a blood test , we'll do this, we'll do this, if it shows so and so you've got it, right. You can't do it, there isn't any, I can can so you all the tests they can do, which in certain people show all abnormalities, but that is not a positive test for ME, how can you test exhaustion, how can you test weakness, how can you

Exercise 2

Excerpts from interview with Sudanese refugee man in his twenties in Cairo, 2006

1. Read the Interview once
2. Formulate your own questions
3. Re-read the material and identify answers to the questions

INTERVIEW DATA STARTS

Hala: Tell me about your experience in Egypt.

A: I'll tell you something. Since I came to Egypt, I have been working. I had many jobs and until now I am working. When I first arrived, I was a bread seller. And then I worked as a cleaner in a villa, and then in a clothes store and then in a shoe store. Afterwards, I started going to the markets. I would take the shoes to the markets on Thursdays and Fridays, sell them, take a share and give the store their share. I mean, I suffered a lot. I suffered from people's treatment. I find people treating me with caution and uneasiness. I was tolerating for the sake of certain goals. One's life in Sudan was difficult. One (*el wa7ed*) has been here for five years. And one hasn't done anything for oneself. One hasn't done anything for one's family. One hasn't completed one's education. One's life, to put it honestly and clearly, has become useless. I mean, one is not studying, is not doing anything for oneself or for one's family. Until now, I don't know what my life will look like. I work for my food, drink, and rent. One's concern is to make money to be able to pay the rent and to pay for food and drink. Other than that, there are no ambitions. One's ambitions have been destroyed here in Egypt. This is the truth. Specifically for me. One has become tired. I have become tired tired tired. Tired of everything. I mean, even. I don't like to talk a lot. Talking much has come to tire me. So when someone asks me, "How are you? How are you doing?" One is sick and smothered by those stories. Everyday there are

rumours about the (UN) office re-opening its doors and re-considering resettlement. And one keeps waiting for resettlement. And it's all nonsense. I have reached a stage that nobody would be able to imagine basically. There was a rumour that married people were getting resettled. So I sacrified and I married a woman who is older than me by 15 years. What forced me to do this is difficult. I had to get into this because. Excuse me, throwing oneself in the Nile would be better than what one is going through now.

Hala: What were your expectations before coming to Egypt?

A: I was expecting the better.

Hala: You were expecting it to be easier?

A: No, nothing is easy. I didn't expect easy. I expected a resolution (*El Farag)*. That God would resolve it. I did the (first) interview and I was accepted, and I thanked God for the acceptance. I felt that my life had started from that moment. I imagined that I already got my Bachelor's and my highest degrees. Afterwards, this dream was taken from me. That was the moment in the second interview. It was as if something was in my hands, but I couldn't grab it. So. I don't know what to tell you. As I told you, I would never be able to describe to you what I'm feeling and how I'm suffering. So I am now in Egypt and I don't know. Until this moment, I don't know what to do. And I'm telling you, if I go back to Sudan if I didn't have problems -- But I feel that *"nefsy te2eela"* (my will is heavy) to go back. My will is heavy to go back. I have been here for five years, and I would go back empty handed "*3ala Kaff Honayen"*. I haven't done anything for myself or anything for my family. It is heavy (a burden) on me. Even if I say I'll go back, I am constrained. My (Sudanese) passport has been cancelled by the UN when they accepted me. If they (the UN) say they accept me, they should make my life easier, and not make it further complicated. They locally resettled me and forced me to

marry this woman. They didn't give me the right of a refugee. So even if I decide to go back, this should take place through the embassy. And what would the embassy say? I am supposedly a refugee. They would tell me, "You are a refugee. You did so and so and so…" All of those are side effects. It can't happen. All of the roads are dangerous. If I go back, it is a dangerous road. If I stay here, this would be impossible. So I am staying here in patience in case there is another solution. So, thank God. Thank God for everything. One is still laughing. One is laughing because one feels that one is still alive. If one lived in depression and pondering and other things, it would possibly lead to bad things like psychological illness, or other illnesses. So one hangs out with one's friends and what not, trying to forget. But one is carrying a lot in one's heart. But we hope that God would solve things. We are hoping for *"el-farag"* from God. [A moment of silence]. In addition, one doesn't know what to tell you. "*El-Ghorba"* (estrangement) in itself is difficult. Being away from your family, from your brothers, from your friends. Some people can't stay away from their family for one hour, let alone 5 years. My mother, I have responsibilities towards her. I am deprived of all of this, and I am unable to do anything about it. You also have responsibilities towards your siblings: taking care of them and attending to their needs. All of this is non-existent. I mean, all of those things are happening to me.

Hala: Are you still in contact with them?

A: I call them every now and then. I have been here for 5 years. I work all day. I don't go to sleep until 5 a.m., not because I don't want to, but because I can't. I can't sleep from all the thinking. Once I put my head on the pillow, I remember everything. I remember all of the miseries. They are all poured on me at once. Time passes and I fall asleep from the exhaustion. I wake up at 9 a.m., and I come to this restaurant. I go around with this bike delivering food around Maadi. Street by street and district by district. So those are all problems. But one still says thank God. I don't like to tell my problems to anyone, even my friends here. Because

even if I tell anyone about my problems, they won't solve them for me. They are all useless words that I stand on my own and keep to myself.

Hala: What helps you when you are sad like this?

A: I don't know. [Laughs with a sigh]. I don't know what helps me. One prays of course and asks God, so one feels calm afterwards (*Bey7ess belra7a*). This is the only thing. Nothing else helps, even if I go to a party or a wedding. It would be just a moment and it ends. And I go back to the pain and memories and such things. Even after sitting with you here, it is difficult for me. I am not prepared: psychologically or emotionally. I am drained. But for the sake of this man [referring to the key informant who put us in contact]. I came here and sat with you.

After a few moments of silence:

A: And I want to tell you about something else. I was engaged to be married. She was a girl from our tribe. This was in Egypt, but she went to the States now, and we got separated. And this was for a number of reasons. The first reason is that I have nothing. My position is not good. I haven't completed my education. There is no known future for me. And this is her right. Why should she bear this? What is her fault? She has no fault. So I felt that I was being unfair to her. And I left her. But she still calls me until now as if we are still engaged. But I don't go along with that. I only talk to her as if she is my sister. But inside my heart, I don't know what to tell you. I mean, I feel fire embers in my heart. It is very difficult, especially such emotional problems. All of my problems are one thing, and this emotional problem is another category of suffering in its own right.

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Session 3: Working with textual material – Newspapers

Below are links for some relevant news articles on mental health and children in the street situation. These articles come from El Masry El Youm and El Ahram which are two of the principle sources we will be investigating. The articles include a mix of sympathetic, unsympathetic, misleading, and other representations of the subjects in question.

Your task is to read the material and apply DA perspectives to produce a preliminary analysis.

From El Masry El Youm:

On mental health:
http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=449443&IssueID=3463

On children in the street situation:
http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=428480

From El Ahram:
On mental health:
http://digital.ahram.org.eg/articles.aspx?Serial=1520086&eid=405

http://digital.ahram.org.eg/articles.aspx?Serial=870319&eid=83

On children in the street situation:
http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/327064.aspx

http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/318661.aspx

http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/324041.aspx

MdM Discourse Analysis workshop

Session 4 Working with film and television material

Exercise

Subject the extracts from the following films to a Discourse Analysis

From the movie: Mutadarah Gharamiyah

This is a famous clip from a very old "comedy" movie that contains a particular representation of mental illness and mental health service providers,

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kf5weqlTKHw

From the movie: Asif a'la al-iz'aag

This is one of the movies that are known to have helped people become more sympathetic and understanding towards people with mental illness. the relevant scene is from 1:22:15-1:24:50.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwrEy8jVYHE

From the movie Ibrahim Alabyad

This is a movie that is very popular amongst children in the street situation.

from min 11:00-17:00

and, from 1:57:00--1:60:00

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRfi-gbcpqU

From the movie Heyna Maysara

This movie addresses a number of social issues including children in the street situation, sex work, and others.

from 1:39:25-1:42:15

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBD2gfTBZLU